

Swan Dahlberg Farmstead  
U.S. Highway 93  
Fortine Vicinity  
Lincoln County  
Montana

HABS No. MT-81

HABS  
MONT,  
27- FOTI.V,  
1-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MT-81

Swan J. Dahlberg Farmstead

HABS  
MONT,  
27-FOTL.V,

Location: The site is located three miles northwest of Fortine, Montana on U.S. Highway 93 on Tract 8D, NW1/4 of the SE1/2 of Section 15, T35N, R26W. 1-

Present Owner: Raymond Flanagan

Present Occupant: Raymond Flanagan

Present Use: Family ranch

Statement of

Significance: The site is a farmstead located in northwest Montana and associated with a locally significant lumberman, railroad contractor and philanthropist--Swan J. Dahlberg. Dahlberg owned and operated several saw-mills and provided railroad ties to and was a contractor for the Great Northern Railway as the company was constructing two spurlines through the Tobacco Plains between 1901 and 1904. He was integral to the early development of Tobacco Plains and Lincoln County during the first two decades of the twentieth century. He contributed to the construction of two essential transportation routes in the valley and was important to the growth of the timber industry in northwest Montana. Dahlberg lived in and ran his many business interests from this farmstead.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection: circa 1902-1918

Architect: Unknown

Historical Narrative: Located in northwest Montana, the Tobacco Plains was first populated by Kootenai Indians in the late 17th century. The area derives its name from the abundant native tobacco plants growing in the valley. Used for ceremonial purposes, the tobacco plants were an important part of Kootenai culture until the late 1700s when tobacco acquired at Canadian trading posts began supplanting it. Tobacco Plains was settled relatively late by whites because of its remoteness, harsh weather and constricted terrain. Nevertheless, it experienced each phase indicative of western settlement (fur trade, mining, the cattle industry, and homesteading), but quickly became reliant on the timber industry and the railroad for its economic prosperity. As with any extractive industry, however, the economy in the valley experienced a number of booms and busts. First explored by the Canadian Northwest and Hudson's Bay companies during the first decades of the 19th century, the valley was not important to either company's operations because of its isolation and sparse Native American population. Although individual Canadian trappers periodically visited the valley, the area's fur resources were not fully exploited. The first major American incursion into northwest Montana occurred in 1864 when gold was discovered near Libby. The miners, however, by-passed the Tobacco Plains Valley in favor of the known prospects of the Kootenai and Fisher Rivers to the west. In the early 1880s,

a few ranchers began cattle operations in the valley. Although the forage was excellent, the limited resources of Tobacco Plains and the great distance to the railroad terminals prevented any large scale stockgrowing operations in the valley. By 1887, the cattle industry had largely been supplanted by logging, trapping and subsistence agriculture. Stockgrowing, however, continued to be a minor industry in the valley. The first homesteads were filed in the vicinity of Sinclair Creek in 1886<sup>1</sup> with numerous other claims filed in the Tobacco River area shortly thereafter.

The same problems plaguing the cattlemen affected the homesteaders, namely, the remoteness of the district and the great distances to the railroad terminals. Most of the homesteads in Tobacco Plains operated at a subsistence level for their owners, who were involved in other economic activities such as fur trapping and logging. In 1892, the Great Northern Railway completed its transcontinental line in Montana, thereby providing better access to regional markets for the homesteaders living in the valley. By 1894, the population had increased enough to warrant the establishment of a post office at the southeastern end of Tobacco Plains. In 1895, the Fort Steele Road was completed, connecting British Columbia with Jennings, Montana. Previously reliant on unimproved trails, the road facilitated the transportation of the valley's produce and timber products to markets in Canada and the Pacific Northwest. Most homesteads were initially located on the upper Tobacco River, but as the most fertile lands were settled adjacent to the river, homesteaders began filing for claims in the area of Grave Creek near present-day Fortine, Montana. The completion of the Great Northern Railway was the single most important event in the development of Tobacco Plains as it allowed the participation of the local farmers in regional<sup>2</sup> markets and contributed to the diversification of the economy in the valley.

In 1897, Otto H. Hough filed for a 160 acre homestead near the confluence of Grave Creek and Tobacco River. Although Hough did not receive title for the land until 1902, he sold the entire 160 acres to Swedish immigrant Swan Dahlberg in 1901. Dahlberg, a railroad contractor and lumberman, maintained the homestead for nearly twenty years, but like many other landowners in northwest Montana was not reliant on it as a primary source of income. Unlike many other farmers in Lincoln County, Dahlberg was an employer rather than employee and was able to significantly participate in the development of the local economy.<sup>3</sup>

#### Biographical Information - Swan J. Dahlberg

Born in Sweden in 1860, Dahlberg arrived in Center City, Minnesota in 1872. Dahlberg came to Montana in 1899 and worked as a contractor on the Great Northern Railway line between Fort Benton and Great Falls. In 1901, he was again employed as a contractor by the Great Northern Railway on the Jennings, Montana-Fernie, British Columbia spurline. It was while working on the spurline that Dahlberg purchased the Otto Hough homestead, which was also located near one of his timber claims. Shortly after purchasing the homestead from Hough, Dahlberg began acquiring land adjoining his property either

directly through cash purchase or indirectly when his employees filed for homestead claims and then signed the land over to him. Dahlberg opened the first of his sawmills in the valley in 1905 and worked as a timber producer for the Eureka Lumber Company. By 1906, he owned hundreds of acres in the Tobacco Plains country.<sup>4</sup>

For reasons of economy, Dahlberg relied more heavily on the timber resources of Tobacco Plains than on agriculture. After crop prices soared with the outbreak of the European war in 1914, Dahlberg chose to develop his timber stands rather than his wheat fields. Because of the war, copper prices sky-rocketed, allowing the Anaconda Copper Mining Company (ACM) to expand its mining operations in Butte. As a consequence, the demand for timbering in new tunnels and support buildings caused the lumber industry in northwestern Montana to boom. Moreover, the homestead boom in the 1910s also aided in the expansion of the timber industry in Lincoln County by creating a demand for new dwellings and outbuildings. Dahlberg took advantage of the state's new-found prosperity by expanding his sawmill in the vicinity of his homestead near Fortine. Dahlberg employed many residents of the valley who were also homesteaders.

Because of the demand for lumber, Dahlberg made only minimal improvements to his homestead during the 1910s. Between 1906 and 1919, only one irrigation ditch and five outbuildings were constructed. Dahlberg, apparently, relied primarily on the abundant wild hay growing naturally in the area to feed his small herd of cattle. Unlike most other homesteads in Lincoln County, the Dahlberg operation appears to have depended on hay as the primary crop rather than wheat. Dahlberg also cleared land on his property, but it is unclear whether it was to increase agricultural production or, more likely, to process the timber for sale.<sup>5</sup>

In 1903, the Great Northern Railway began construction of a spurline connecting Columbia Falls with the coal fields near Fernie, British Columbia. The Columbia Falls Cut-Off or Crow's Nest Line entered the valley at the southeast and traversed it to Eureka, near the Canadian border. Previously, the railroad right-of-way went south of Tobacco Plains, totally by-passing the valley. Dahlberg worked as a sub-contractor to the railroad in carving a right-of-way through the Whitefish and Cabinet Mountains of northwest Montana. The completion of the Crow's Nest Line between Columbia Falls and Fernie in 1904 provided an economic boost to the valley as numerous small railroad "tank" towns sprang up along the line, making it easier for homesteaders to transport their produce to regional markets. The railroad itself, moreover, provided jobs to area residents and, most importantly, caused the timber industry to boom. The timber industry in Tobacco Plains continued to expand throughout the 1910s in response to industrial demands in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountains.<sup>6</sup>

In 1919, Dahlberg severed his ties to the Eureka Lumber Company and constructed a sawmill and milltown on Barnaby Lake near his homestead. The mill supported many of the homesteaders in the valley as a post-war economic

depression and drought struck much of Montana. In 1923, Dahlberg moved the sawmill to an unknown location. Perhaps for financial reasons, however, the camp was not in operation for much of the summer of 1924.

In October, 1924, Dahlberg was killed when his car was struck by a Great Northern locomotive north of his farmstead. Although declared an accident by the county coroner, rumors persisted that it was a suicide brought about by Dahlberg's financial difficulties. Upon Dahlberg's death, Eureka City Attorney, Horace Pomeroy, filed probate against his estate and the farmstead reverted to the control of the First National Bank in Kalispell. In 1926, Henry Yoppe purchased the farmstead property and operated it as a sheep ranch, constructing two large sheep barns and numerous outbuildings. In 1942, Yoppe dismantled one of the barns and shipped it to Livingston. In 1943, he deeded the farmstead to Raymond Flanagan, who still owns the property.

Swan Dahlberg played a significant role in the early economic development of Tobacco Plains, first as a railroad contractor, then as a farmer and, most importantly, a lumberman. Dahlberg, like many other farmers in the valley, was not reliant on a single source of income and branched out into many different business endeavors. Many homesteaders in the valley also worked for wages either for the railroad or in one of many logging camps and sawmills located in the valley. Unlike the others, however, Dahlberg was able to acquire large tracts of land, which he exploited for its timber resources. Called the "Patron Saint of the Fortine Country," Dahlberg was considered a man of "sterling qualities...whose integrity was never questioned [and] whose friendship was prized and highly valued by all who knew him." Dahlberg was a Mason and a member of the Order of Elks. Dahlberg was indicative of community-building entrepreneurs throughout Montana during the early years of the 20th century. He was involved in a host of business activities that benefitted and aided the development of Montana.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Information

The Dahlberg homestead consists of 10 buildings, three of which are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The three--residence, garage/storage, and bunkhouse/granary-- were constructed between 1902 and 1918 and are associated with Swan Dahlberg's tenure as owner of the farm. The residence was considered a showcase in the Tobacco Plains valley in 1924. A sketch map on Data Page 10 shows orientation and location of the structures.

#### 1. Summary Description:

During road construction in the 1930s, Structures 7 and 1 were moved from their original locations and relocated away from the road project to their current sites. It is unknown where the original road was located in relation to the current site plan.

A. Structure #9: Residence

Structure #9 is a two-story rectangular wood frame Colonial Revival-style residence with a hip roof and seven second-story gable roof wall dormers. An asphalt shingled hip roof rear extension has a gable roof dormer and enclosed porch on the southside. The front has a full-width open-air porch sheltered by a hip roof supported by turned posts. The porch has a wood plank floor and is enclosed by a low wood railing. The entry is central to the front and is reached through the porch. A fanlight is located above the door. There are two interior corbeled brick chimneys and the foundation is pier and concrete.

The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles. The fabric consists primarily of non-historic asbestos siding, manufactured to appear as wide-reveal clapboard. Some of the asbestos siding has, however, fallen away to show the original narrow-reveal wood clapboard siding. Windows throughout the structure are two-over-two double-hung with the exception of the side porch, where they are two-over-two fixed. Two main floor windows on the south have decorative wood shutters. The site is level and a wind break is located to the northeast.

B. Structure #7: Garage/Storage

Structure #7 is a one-story wood frame combination garage and storage shed. The structure is sheathed in horizontal wood board siding with corner boards, which has deteriorated and is warped and buckled. The corner boards are the only decorative feature remaining on the building. The gable roof has deteriorated 2 x 8 inch and 2 x 10 inch vertical wood planks and is missing the characteristic rolled tarpaper undercoating. The structure has a two-over-two double-hung window on the east side and two 2-light fixed windows on the south side. The north-facing front has a centrally located entry with a large sliding wood door. The door is mounted on rollers and an exterior track. There is a secondary entry at the rear. The entire structure is severely deteriorated and is leaning. The building has no foundation and is built directly on the ground.

C. Structure #1: Bunkhouse/Granary

The bunkhouse/granary is a one and one-half story wood frame structure with a log foundation. The gable roof has exposed rafters and wood shingles with rolled tarpaper undercoating. The extended ridge purlin functions as a pulley mount on the front gable-end. The structure is sheathed in horizontal board siding with corner boards. There are four windows on the north, one bottom window and a large cut-out doorway on the east, two windows (one up and one down) and a large door on the second story. The second-story door is centrally located with a landing/porch supported by brackets. The remains of a staircase lead to the porch and there is a stove pipe hole in the roof. The fabric on Structure # 1 is intact and the building retains many of its original design features, including exposed rafters, the remains of an exterior staircase and original board siding and wood shingling. The entire structure is severely deteriorated, however, and will be demolished prior to the highway reconstruction.

#### D. Site and Surroundings

1. Orientation and General Setting: The site is located in a northwest-southeast trending valley. The valley is drained by numerous small creeks feeding into the Tobacco River. The nearest tributary to the site is Grave Creek, located northwest of the site. The valley is bordered by the Whitefish range on the east and the Cabinet Mountains on the west. The site is located on a gently rolling marshy meadow interspersed with timber stands. The site is bisected by U.S. Highway 93. Structure # 9 and is oriented north-northeast to south-southwest; Structure # 7 is oriented northwest to southwest. Across U.S. Highway 93, Structure # 1 is oriented north-northwest to south-southeast.

2. Other Structures: There are seven other structures located on-site, none of which are associated with Swan Dahlberg during his tenure as owner of the farmstead from 1901 to 1924. Structure #2 is a gable roof wood frame tack barn with horizontal board siding and two doors and two windows. Structure #3 is a blacksmith shop and is structurally similar to S-2. Structure #4 is a sheep barn with a gable and shed roof with horizontal and vertical board siding. Structure #5 is a shed roof pump house and Structure #6 is a storage shed. Structure #8 is a recently constructed shed roof garage with metal siding. Structure #10 is a privy.

#### PART III. SOURCES OF PROJECT INFORMATION

Montana Department of Highway's plans call for the demolition of Structure #1 because of its location in relation to the proposed highway reconstruction and because it is too deteriorated to move to a new location further away from the proposed highway project. The structure will be razed in 1991. The site will retain Structures #9 and #7. The highway will be widened and resurfaced at this location.

#### PART IV. ENDNOTES

1. Olga Johnson. The Story of the Tobacco Plains Country. (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1950), 6-7, 34-35; Michael Malone and Richard Roeder. Montana: A History of Two Centuries. (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 21.
2. Johnson, 157-169; Malone and Roeder, 135-136; Heritage Research Center. "Fortine North Highway Improvement Project [F 5-4 (4) 168]: Impact Upon Cultural Resources." (Missoula, Montana: Heritage Research Center, 1985), 13-15.
3. Johnson, 162; Historical Research Associates, 30.
4. Eureka Journal, October 9, 1924; Libby Western News, October 9, 1924; Johnson, 180; Historical Research Center, 30-31.

5. Heritage Research Associates, Ibid; Malone and Roeder, 253-255; Connie Moore and Jon Axline. "Cultural Resource Inventory and Assessment: Pleasant Valley, Montana [F 1-1(39) 57]." Report Prepared for Delta Engineering, Inc. (Butte, Montana: GCM Services, Inc., 1989), 6.
6. Johnson, 180, 227; Marie C. Shea. Early Flathead and Tobacco Plains. (Published by author, 1977), 166-167; Robert Herrig Interview by William Babcock, Libby, Montana, November 29, 1984.
7. Eureka Journal, October 9, 1924; Johnson, 227; Malone and Roeder, 217.
8. Heritage Research Center, 31-32; Petition For Probate of Will, No. 361, Swan J. Dahlberg Estate. October 11, 1924. Clerk of Court, Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana; Helen Fitzgerald Sanders. History of Montana, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 1621.
9. Eureka Journal, October 9, 1924.

#### PART V. Bibliography

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Yoppe, Gwendolyn Interview by William Babcock, Eureka, Montana, November 29, 1984.

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Montana Department of Highways  
March 1, 1990.

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